open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

High School Activity:
Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton

Grade: High School—Course 6 (1700, 1956, 2196, 2234-2243, 2258-2262) or Option C (842, 1877-1948, 1928-1942, 2196-2257).

Catechetical Concepts:

- God has taught us how to live a new life in Christ
- God rules the universe with wisdom and directs its divine fulfillment (CCC 1719)
    - Basis for human rights and duties (CCC 1956)
- Living New Life in Christ Jesus and the Gospel message are the basis for Catholic Moral Teaching
    - Virtue (CCC 1803)
    - Cardinal virtues (CCC 1804, 1810-11)

"We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice."

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Name and understand the four cardinal virtues.
2. Discuss human rights as related to problems of slavery, racism, and discrimination.
3. Discuss the cardinal virtues as part of how we live in response to the Gospel.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God."

- "Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustice it produces, then healing can occur."

- "We also realize the ways that racism has permeated the life of the Church and persists to a degree even today. . . . We, the Catholic bishops in the United States, acknowledge the

many times when the Church has failed to live as Christ taught – to love our brothers and sisters."

- "We also charge . . . all our educational institutions to break any silence around the issue of racism, to find new and creative ways to raise awareness, analyze curricula, and to teach the virtues of fraternal charity."

Background for the Educator

- The two types of virtues are **cardinal virtues and the theological virtues. The cardinal virtues are** referred to as "moral" virtues or "human" virtues. The **theological virtues,** faith, hope, and love, relate directly to God and help Christians live in relationship with the Holy Trinity.

- The Apostle Paul refers to the virtues in his Letter to the Philippians: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8). According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "a virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions" (CCC 1803).

- The cardinal virtues are **prudence** (which disposes us to discern what is good and to choose the right means of achieving it), **justice** (which disposes us to give all, God and neighbor, what is due to them), **fortitude** (which helps us to be firm when encountering difficulties in pursuit of the good), and **temperance** (which helps us to restrain our appetites to what is in accord with reason). The cardinal virtues are undergirded by the theological virtues of **faith** (which disposes us to believe in God and all that He reveals to us), **hope** (confidence that with God's grace we will be able to obtain the eternal happiness promised by God), and **charity/love** (love infused into our hearts by God that enables us to love God above all things and to love our neighbor and all created things for God's sake). Paul teaches about the theological virtues in 1 Corinthians 13:13: "So faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

- For a more extensive treatment and coverage of the cardinal and theological virtues, see paragraphs 1803-1845 of the *Catechism*.

- Human rights have a correlation to the virtues, especially as human rights relate to how we love our neighbor. Jesus teaches us how we are to love our neighbor throughout the gospels. Jesus' "first" or "Greatest Commandment" tells us to love God first and then to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (see Mark 12:28). Further, we learn what has come to be known as the "Golden Rule" in the gospel of Luke: by which Jesus expects us to "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

- Human rights are universal. They include the right to life, access to basic physical needs such as food, water, and shelter, freedom from violence, the practice of religion, and protection against unjust discrimination. "The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: 'Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design'" (CCC 1935, quoting paragraph 2 of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*).

- For a more extensive treatment and coverage of what is understood by human rights, see paragraphs 1928-1948 of the *Catechism*.

Additional Resources for the Educator

- It would be worthwhile to have some background information on Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton's life prior to having your students complete some of the activities at the end of this lesson. Since he is on the road to canonization, there is a website devoted to his cause for canonization which provides a detailed biography of his life.

- *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, A Pastoral Letter Against Racism

Instructions for the Lesson

Introduce the lesson to the students:

- Read or summarize with the students the history of slavery in the U.S.:

> ***A Brief History of Institution of Slavery in the United States***
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> *Slavery is a great stain on the history of the United States. It is difficult to imagine that there once was a time when people, by the thousands, were kidnapped and forcibly removed from their families and their native land. They were stripped of their language, culture, dignity, and human rights. They were treated as livestock. Many Americans of European descent were taught from birth that people of African descent were not human.*
>
> *It is particularly scandalous that some clergymen and other prominent Christians defended slavery by misinterpreting the Bible - taking passages out of context, ignoring many of Christ's commands, and removing entire chapters and books of the Bibles given to slaves.*

> *Slavery fueled the economic progress of the South and was officially sanctioned in the early court systems of our country. For approximately two hundred years, slavery served as the economic backbone of the southern states that eventually joined the Confederacy.*
>
> *In 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, before the U.S. Congress formally ended slavery in the United States with the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on December 6, 1865. Despite the end of legalized slavery, newly-freed black people faced many obstacles to obtaining basic human necessities and rights of U.S. citizenship. Some of those struggles remain.*

Talk about the Catholic foundation for human rights and human dignity.

- Ask students to split into small groups. Have each group create a list of what they consider rights and what they consider needs.
- Then, watch this video from USCCB and Catholic Relief Services on the principle of "Rights and Responsibilities" from Catholic Social Teaching.
- Ask the students to compare their lists to the list of rights named in the video. Do they match up? If not, discuss.
- Ask the groups to compare their own list to other groups' lists and see what differences there might be between the lists. Ask students to defend their choices and converse about the choices they made.

Summary and Final Activity

Then, ask students to research the life of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton, who went from being a slave to being ordained a Catholic priest.

- Read the biography of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton from the Prophetic Witnesses Against Racism handout or from the website.
- Then, complete the following reflective activity:
    - Ask why Venerable Fr. Tolton is a model for the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, and for the four cardinal virtues of fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance?

- Imagine that Venerable Fr. Tolton lived during our time and were to visit a high school named after him, Fr. Tolton Catholic High School. Come up with five characteristics this school would exhibit to embody the spirit of Venerable Fr. Tolton. Write a mission statement for the high school based on the virtues Venerable Fr. Tolton displayed.

- Alternatively, think about your own school. What are five things your school could do to embody the spirit of Venerable Fr. Tolton? What features might Venerable Fr. Tolton think best reflect his legacy of living virtuously and serving God even through adversity?

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